

FEDERATION FOR DETACHED YOUTH WORK

Detached Youth Work Covid Update
6th November 2020

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The UK government's decision to put in place a further lockdown (operative from November the 5th to December the 2nd 2020) has generated new questions for detached youth workers. This is an addendum to earlier guidance issued on the 15th of June 2020: <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Detached-Guidance-full.pdf>.

This earlier guidance is largely unchanged, **so you should still use it**. Nonetheless, some points are worthy of clarification and re-iteration:

- Above all, it's important to maintain a commitment to the principles of detached youth work: you are first and foremost an educator, albeit with important safeguarding duties, including working to secure the welfare and well-being of young people.
- Ensure you have clear messaging about the current regulations. Acknowledge though that there are things that are difficult to understand (and explain) at the moment, and much is open to interpretation. For example, young people might say: 'why can we spend the day together in school but not meet up with our mates afterwards?' Engage them in dialogue about what they think (note: some may be unsure), and their reasons for doing what they are doing / being out and about. Discuss what is happening, their experiences, and the future. This is an opportunity to do really important political education work – encouraging young people to think critically; discuss with others; ask questions; articulate their 'voice'; attempt to influence decision-making: it is consistent with our participatory ethic.
- Ask and learn from them; this will inform your advocacy work, especially in terms of helping adults in the community, the wider public, the authorities, and decision-makers better understand young people's lives and their thinking. Consider quoting Calum Semple, Professor of Child Health & Outbreak Medicine, University of Liverpool (BBC News, 24th August 2020); his views demonstrate the paucity of engagement with young people about their thoughts and experiences of COVID19:

When the children's views have been sought they themselves have identified that there has been difficulty with communicating with their age group. Perhaps we could have done a lot better there.

- The regulations state detached youth workers are exempt from the regulations that aim to prevent people gathering outdoors. Whilst not being identified as 'essential' at a national level, workers should make contact (and do so again if necessary) with their local Neighbourhood Police Team to confirm their local status and ensure awareness of their exemption from the regulations.
- Remember, the work you do now will likely have a legacy that can contribute to securing improved (and permanent) detached youth work service provision in the future. Continue to engage, build, and strengthen partnership work with decision-makers, relevant local authority officers, the Voluntary and Charitable Sector (VCS), and other youth work allies to achieve this.

Specifically, the emphasis is on engaging those 'vulnerable'. Detached workers are able to:

- Engage 'vulnerable' young people on a 1:1 basis, including indoors. Note however: you cannot undertake more general home visits. Consider going for a walk with the young person; in considering the wider issues of

wellbeing and welfare, we want young people to be outside in parks and public space in support of this, but to do so safely.

- Recognise the tensions when told you can work with 'vulnerable' young people, without vulnerability being defined. It would be easy to ascribe vulnerability to all young people. This can be in conflict with our ethic to regard (as reasonably appropriate) young people as persons with autonomy, agency and power. Likewise, take care with 'safeguarding'. Respect your knowledge of who needs help; it's not just those who have been identified through formal mechanisms, like Early Help; trust in your relationships with young people to determine this.
- Create 1:1 drop-in facilities and conduct doorstep 'check-ins' (although not in gardens) to assess young people's welfare. Think about taking youth work resources for their use at home; this can help.
- Organise and facilitate targeted support groups for up to 15 young people indoors, provided the young people are formally invited. Note: as you are a professional 'at work' you will not be breaking the law in engaging groups of young people outdoors.
- Continue to take part in professional activities, including training, indoors. Remember though home-working is encouraged. If you do go to your office or workplace consider employment law, and what is needed to create a COVID-secure environment. Check out the guidance on face coverings.

Other

- Under this new lockdown 'visibility issues' once more come to the fore. Read the NYA guidance. Print a copy of the Red Level one-page factsheet. Carry it with you; it will be useful if you are challenged about being 'out there'. Make sure you have your I.D.
- The health of welfare of workers is paramount. There is an ethic of self-care. The science says that transmission rates are highest among 16 -24 years old, with 11 – 15 years olds not far behind. Few will have symptoms - most will be 'asymptomatic'; do not think young people cannot contract or spread this virus. Do not work if you consider yourself to be at high risk; challenge those who say you should. Fundamentally, those with health concerns should be able to undertake non-face-to-face duties.
- If what you are able to do at work is constrained (as will be the case for almost everybody), do consider how you can support others whose work affords them greater freedoms. For example, you may be a local authority worker who has been told to suspend face-to-face work, but in an area where colleagues in the voluntary sector are still working directly with young people. Use your experience to help guide fellow detached workers, act in solidarity with them and the young people we all aim to serve, build a community of practice.
- Think in advance of December the 2nd (when the lockdown is due to end); consider how you can help young people transition back to relevant 'tiers'.
- Finally, everything is still very much in 'flux'; it is essential to keep up-to-date with any changes in local and national restrictions.
- For further support or training, contact info@fdyw.org.uk

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